

Grace Life Fellowship Group

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1 Thessalonians 1:4–6

*Assurance and the Word of God*

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians.

We find ourselves in the middle of Paul's thanksgiving to God on behalf of the Thessalonians.

Last time, we saw that the Apostle Paul was grateful to God for the spiritual fruit that was being born in the lives of the Thessalonians.

Their faith was producing good works; their love for Christ was producing laboring efforts on behalf of others in the body of Christ; and their hope in Christ was producing a spiritual stability and steadfastness.

And so we considered the biblical principle that spiritual realities show themselves by what they produce in a person's life.

And as we will look at today, he was thankful for the powerful and effective work of the **message** of God in the lives of the people.

So as we begin this morning, let's read chapter 1 together:

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**1 Thessalonians 1 (NASB95)**

**1** Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

**2** We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers;

**3** constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,

**4** knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you;

**5** for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

**6** You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

**7** so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

**8** For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.

**9** For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,

**10** and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

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One of the things that struck me this week in the study is the seeming foolishness of what we gather to do every week as a church.

From the world's perspective, it appears foolish for a group of people to gather together in order to study and be exhorted according to the words of an ancient letter that was written by an ancient author to an ancient audience.

What does this have to do with us?

And one way we could answer is by saying, "Because we expect to receive some genuine spiritual benefit: encouragement, correction, wisdom, instructions, and ultimately, the eternal salvation of our souls."

But even after we have answered the “what” question – **what** we expect to receive from the Bible – the more important question is **why**.

In other words...

**Why** is it that we expect some spiritual benefit from taking the time to study, to meditate on, and to live according to what is written in a letter like this, or any other book of the Bible?

Yes, the Apostle Paul and the members of the church in Thessalonica worship the same God that we worship, but why is it that we take the time to extract the details from this letter between them?

Why do we think that spiritual life can be found as we understand and apply the contents of **this** letter?

Surely, there have been many other books down through Christian history that have been written by men just as godly and just as faithful to Christ as the Apostle Paul.

So why do we put the Bible in a class by itself? What makes the Bible so unique?

And you already know the answer: It is because on the Scriptures contain the very life and breath of God.

It is the only place we can go to find the words of the God of creation.

The Creator of the universe has desired to make Himself known to His creatures, who are made in His image.

In the past, He chose to make Himself known to Abraham by directly speaking to him.

He chose to make Himself known to Isaac by appearing and speaking to Him.

He chose to make Himself known to Jacob by appearing to him in a dream.

He made Himself known to Moses by appearing to him in a burning bush.

He chose to make Himself known to the people of Israel through the mouthpiece of Aaron and Moses.

He chose to make Himself known to the generation after generation of Hebrews through chosen prophets.

And as time went on, these prophets were writing down the words of God and were recognized by the people of God **as** the words of God.

And then... When God Himself took on flesh and dwelt among us, He not only affirmed that the Old Testament Scriptures are the very word of God, but Christ authorized His Apostles to receive and communicate the words of God.

In other words, the Apostles had the unique privilege and authority to communicate and write down the very words of God.

And so the point is this: We gather to hear from these ancient writings because in them we find not merely the words of men, but the very words of the Eternal and Sovereign God of heaven and earth.

And here is the connection we need to make: Not only are the Scriptures unique in what they **are**: They are uniquely the words of God...

But they are therefore unique in what they are **able to do**.

The Scriptures are not simply unique in what they **are**, but unique in what they are **able to do**.

In other words, because they are **God's** words, they come with a **divine** spiritual effectiveness.

**Hebrews 4:12 (NASB95)**

**12** For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, **[that is what the word of God is, now listen for what the word of God is able to do]** and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

It **is** living and acting, and therefore, it has divine power to pierce to the inner depths of the soul.

The word of God is able to:

- pierce the conscience,
- challenge the mind,
- judge the heart,
- and bring life to the soul.

So these two ideas must be kept in mind:

1. The Scriptures are unique in what they **are**, and
2. they are therefore unique in what they **do**.

Listen for both of these ideas in 2 Timothy 3:16–17

**2 Timothy 3:16–17 (NASB95)**

**16** All Scripture is [breathed out] by God **[once again, this what the Scriptures are: they are the very breath of God. Now, notice what they are able to accomplish]** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

**17** so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Do we see the point? The **nature** of the Scriptures are directly linked to the **power** of the Scriptures.

So, that is why we come to this letter with eager anticipation: to be fed by the very words of God so that we may experience the power of God in our souls as we humbly receive it.

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So what this means is that anything less than the word of God does not and cannot come with the power of God.

Only the words of God have divine power.

So if churches give to the people of God anything less than the word of God, then God's people are robbed.

When God's word is preached, the degree to which that preaching is tethered to the text of Scripture is the degree to which God's people gain access to its divine power.

The pragmatic church movement is an obvious example where people lose access to the power of the Scriptures.

As they are more interested in attracting audiences with their style and culture, what is lost is the depth and clarity of the Scriptures.

If we wanted to give the most charitable interpretation of the pragmatism in churches today, we would affirm their desire to see as many people come to know Christ as possible.

Their ministry philosophy is one that seeks to draw in as many people to their services as possible by offering them an environment that they would want to be a part of... in order to maximize the exposure to the message of the gospel.

But in order to keep the crowds interested, what they are offered is something less than the full counsel of God in the Scriptures.

They may be proclaiming some level of truth, but it inevitably becomes mixed with worldly wisdom and human philosophy.

The best case scenario is that they hold to and teach the biblical message, but in order for them to be faithful to their attractional and pragmatic ministry philosophy...

the message **has to** become integrated with human psychology, politics, entertainment, or something that will be a hook for their listeners.

And what is the result?

Well, when the people of God are given something less than the pure word of God... they no longer have access to the only thing that is able to save and sanctify their souls.

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But this is also seen in the recent rise of Reformed Scholasticism.

There is a debate going on today between two groups, which we might call Biblicism and the other Scholasticism.

And this debate is going on between those within the Reformed world – In other words, between people who say they hold a high view of the Scriptures and a high view of the Sovereignty of God.

The Biblicists are saying what we have said so far: It is Scripture alone that is our only authority because it is Scripture alone that comes from God.

And once again, if we want to be as charitable as possible, they are saying that even though Scripture is our authority, we need to also consult the ancient creeds, confessions, and other Christian writings throughout history.

They say that we shouldn't pretend like we are the first generation of Christians to study and to interpret the Bible, so we need to read and benefit from the wealth of Christian tradition and writings down through the centuries.

And if we wanted to interpret what they are saying in the best possible light, we would say, "Yes, of course we can and do benefit from the history of Christian writings and creeds."

But that charitable interpretation becomes more difficult when they begin to say things like this:

"We need the guidance of the 'great Tradition', the creeds, the early church councils, and the early church fathers, and the Protestant confessions **when interpreting the Bible.**"<sup>1</sup>

So, is it being said that we need to interpret the Bible through the lens of church creeds and traditions?

Well, listen to another author:

"proper interpretation proves itself to be such when our reading of Scripture accords with what the church teaches."<sup>2</sup>

On the back of the same book, we read the following:

"[This book argues] that Scripture is interpreted correctly only when read through the lens of creedal orthodoxy"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Terry L. Johnson, *The Identity and Attributes of God*, 12.

<sup>2</sup> R.R. Reno, *The End of Interpretation: Reclaiming the Priority of Ecclesial Exegesis*, xv.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, back cover.



In other words, our Scripture must be filtered through ancient Christian creeds.

So, it becomes harder to understand the Reformed Scholasticism in a charitable way when it becomes clear that they are not simply recommending that we can **benefit** from ancient creeds and Christian writings, but that we should make them the interpretive lens of Scripture.

What is the error here?

They are suggesting that the **primary** source of the Scriptures be filtered through the **secondary** source of ancient creeds and Christian traditions.

You remember the difference between primary sources and secondary sources:

- A primary source is the original document that you are studying, which for us is the Bible.
- And secondary sources are interpretations of and summaries of the primary source.

Secondary sources would be things like Christian books, ancient Christian creeds and traditions, and even Christian sermons.

And so as Biblicists, we say yes, we can absolutely **benefit** from secondary sources, but we do not use secondary source material to **interpret** primary source material.

We benefit from books and sermons and creeds, but we do not elevate these things and make them an authority over the Bible.

Of course, we do not reject or ignore the legitimate role of secondary sources.

In the very word of God, we see commands like Paul gave to Timothy, “Preach the Word!”

That is a command in which Paul is commanding Timothy to interpret, and proclaim the word of God for the benefit of people of God.

His proclamation of the word of God is itself a secondary source that interprets and explains God's word.

So, Christian books and creeds and sermons are entirely legitimate and can be a benefit to the body of Christ...

But the issue is not whether these things are **useful** to us, but whether they have the **authority to interpret Scripture** for us.

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Now our purpose here is not to beat up on these movements, but it is to consider the danger of giving people something less than the word of God.

Here is the point: If we filter the Scriptures through human psychology or through the traditions and creeds of Christian history, then the people of God are robbed of the power of the word of God.

That's what matters.

So, whether we consider the pragmatic church movement that gives people loosely biblical sermons mixed with human wisdom, or the scholastic movement that wants to filter the Word of God through ancient creeds...

the end result is that God's people being cut off from the only divinely powerful means by which their souls can be fed.

That's the issue. That is what's at stake.

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So often, the debates about different denominations or church practices are presented as merely a difference in style or preference.

And of course, we do have some biblical freedom in how we express certain biblical principles within our various churches.

We don't have to be monolithic in all that we do.

But the heart of the issue with movements like pragmatism or scholasticism is that they put a **barrier** in between the people of God and the word of God.

The people of God become one more degree removed from God and His Words.

And so what happens?

The farther removed from God's word that the people of God are, the farther removed they are from the power that God has invested in His word.

So it is not merely an issue of **preference**, but an issue of **power**:

Are Christ's sheep being fed by the words of God which is able to save and sanctify their souls...

Or is the food of God's word being mixed with something else that causes it to become something that is, at best, weak in power, or at worst, completely devoid of divine power.

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Now as we turn our attention to our passage this morning, what we are going to see is that the word of God empowered by the Spirit of God which is able to provide the sweet comfort of assurance to the believer.

It is the Spirit, working through both the delivery of the Word and the reception of the Word, that gives to the heart of the Christian assurance that they are truly an elect child of God.

To put it negatively, when the word of God is not **delivered** by the aid of the Spirit...

or when the word of God is not **received** into our hearts by the aid Spirit... the result in the believer's life is a lack of certainty about their salvation.

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Notice verse 4 of 1 Thessalonians 1:

**1 Thessalonians 1:4 (NASB95)**

**4** knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you;

Paul is here saying, I give thanks to God for you, because I know that God has chosen you.

That is the language of assurance.

He says, "I give thanks to God because I am certain that God has chosen you for salvation."

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Now, what we are going to see in the next two verses are specific reasons why he was so assured and confident that they were indeed the elect of God.

Think about how these words would have been received by their original audience.

An apostle is writing to you and is saying that he **knows** that you are chosen by God.

And he doesn't just leave them there by merely asserting that he knows they are God's elect, but he wants to strengthen their assurance even more by providing specific reasons for his confidence.

“I thank God for you because I know you are elect, now let me tell you where your confidence comes from”

In effect, he not only wants to assert his own assurance of their election, but he wants to leave them with specific reasons why **they** can have assurance of their own election.

And what we are going to find is that the evidences of their election are directly tied to the powerful working of the Holy Spirit of God by means of the word of God.

Notice the beginning of verse 5: He says “our **gospel**” which refers to the word of God.

Then the middle of verse 6: He says, “having received **the word**”

He is drawing their attention to the work of the word in them.

But he also emphasizes the Spirit’s role in using the word.

Notice the middle of verse 5: He says, “in the Holy Spirit”

And at the end of verse 6, “with the joy of **the Holy Spirit**”

His assurance that these saints were indeed chosen by God comes from the work of the Spirit of God by means of the Word of God.

And so what we are going to find in this passage are

### **Two Spirit-Empowered Provisions to Strengthen the Believer’s Assurance**

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First of all, **The Powerful Effect of the Word**

Notice verse 5 again,

**1 Thessalonians 1:5 (NASB95)**

**5** for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction...

He is describing here the manner in which the gospel message was delivered to them.

And first, he says it did not come in mere words.

It most certainly came in words, but there was something additional that our message came with.

And what was that something extra?

He says that the message came in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

Now, let's take these one at a time.

First of all, he says, our gospel did not come in word only, but also in power.

To say that the gospel came to them **in power** means that the gospel came with **spiritual effectiveness**.

The message didn't come in mere words that fell flat and couldn't produce any effect.

No, our message came with an effectiveness that could not have been accomplished by mere human words alone.

It was not a message that came from our mouths and into your ears only, but it was accompanied by a spiritual power which produced an effect in you.

It was not a powerless, empty, or weak message. It was not a message that was ineffectual and fruitless.

It was the kind of message that produce an effect in it's hearers.

And this is an assertion not so much about their preaching style, but about the nature of the message itself.

He does not say, "Our **preaching** came to you in power," but "Our **gospel** came to you in power"

Power an effectiveness is an attribute of the message, not necessarily of a particular preaching style.

That is the nature of the word of God: It is able to bring about genuine, spiritual results.

This is the Powerful Effect of the Word.

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Not only was their message effective in its power, but then he says, that their gospel came "in the Holy Spirit"

This phrase indicates the **source** of the power that the message came with.

It was the person of the Holy Spirit who was working in the message that we preached to bring about its effectiveness.

The power was not a human power of persuasion, but it was a **divine** power that accompanied our message.

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The only message that the Spirit of God is interested in empowering is the Word of God.

The Spirit is the one that takes our human words, and infuses them with His divine spiritual power, so that they bring about a spiritual effect.

And let us not forget the connection to verse 4.

So far, Paul has said that he is certain of their election because the message of the gospel came to them in the power of the Holy Spirit.

His confidence of their salvation – and therefore, their own confidence of their own salvation – is directly related to the fact that the Spirit was at work in the message they received.

So, what is at stake in the hearts of God's people when they receive less than the word of God?

Well, if they receive less than the word of God, they do not receive a message empowered by the Spirit of God.

And if they are receiving a message not empowered by the Spirit of God, then they are left without this assurance that they are God's elect.

To put it another way, we can say this: Only the Word of God empowered by the Spirit of God has spiritual effectiveness.

And where that spiritual effectiveness is operative, the people of God are assured that they belong to God.

God's people are robbed of assurance of their own spiritual standing before God when they are robbed of the Spirit-empowered word of God.

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I think many of us have experienced what this is like.

You come to an expository ministry for the first time, where the Word of God is preached with precision and accuracy, and you feel like almost for the first time, you are hearing the voice of God.

What's happening there?

It is the Spirit of God who delights to make the Word of God effective in the hearts of God's elect.

So when the Word of God is proclaimed with clarity and faithfulness to the original meaning of the text, the Spirit of God produces comfort and correction and encouragement and warning and instruction to the heart of the believer.

And as the Spirit is at work in and through His word, the believer is assured that they belong to God.

This is why we say that expository preaching it is **not** merely a matter of style or preference, but is intimately connected with the spiritual health and vitality of the people of God.

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I have spoken to some of you about this very thing.

We come to an expository ministry, and although it is like a spiritual breath of fresh air, it can also be jarring.

We think, "I am grateful for the spiritual effectiveness of the word of God that I am receiving now, but what about all those years before?"

Did the gospel come to me in word only? Or did it come to me in power and in the Holy Spirit?

Well, when the word of God is being mixed with human wisdom or with something else, it becomes difficult to discern.

We can't change the past, but what we **can** do now is ensure that this divinely powerful message we are **now** hearing is being humbly received by faith.

You see, this is the connection between the assurance of the believer and the Spirit-empowered message in the preaching of the Word of God.

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But there is yet another layer to this. He says in verse 5,

**1 Thessalonians 1:5 (NASB95)**

**5** for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit **and with full conviction;**

With full conviction.

Here, he is referring to the fact that the preachers themselves were fully convinced of their own message.

In other words, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy did not enter Thessalonica with a divinely powerful message that **they themselves** didn't appear to be unconvinced of.

No, they were fully assured and certain of the divine power of their message.

This is what gave them such boldness: **They really believed that the gospel is the power of God for salvation.**

They were not insincere salesmen who were selling a message that they didn't believe in.

They came with a divinely powerful message that produced in them a boldness and conviction.

They were absolutely convinced that their message was divinely powerful.

“Our gospel,” Paul says, came to you by way of preachers who were fully convinced of the divine effectiveness of their own message.

So, our gospel did not come to you in word only, but in divine effectiveness, given by the Holy Spirit Himself, and it came to you by messengers who had full conviction in what they were preaching.

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Now, notice that last clause in verse 5:

**1 Thessalonians 1:5 (NASB95)**

**5** ... just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

He is drawing their attention to the life and character of the missionaries that came to them.

The message itself came to you in power, and the preachers of the message were fully convinced of its power.

And on top of that, you had evidence that that the preachers were indeed convinced of their own message, because you saw their lives.

We didn't come to you with a divinely effective message that had no effect on our own lives.

The power that accompanied our message was **also** at work within us.

It was not as though our message came to you with a divine effectiveness, but our lives before you were absent of the same divine effect.

No, the powerful effect of the message was validated in the lives of the preachers.

So, Paul is saying, “I am certain of your election, because the message that came to you was Spirit-empowered and divinely effective, and you saw its effectiveness not only in our boldness, but also in the way that we lived.”

Very often, when we think about assurance, we don’t consider the nature of the message that we receive.

But for Paul, this was the first reason that came to mind: “I know that you are God’s elect because of the nature of the message that was delivered to you.”

So once again, we come to this idea that the message that people receive is directly tied to whether they can be assured that they belong to God.

This is why we do not play games with the message or give people something other than God’s message.

Sometimes we think we are doing people a favor by giving them a loosely biblical gospel mixed with human wisdom...

but at best we are giving them a message that provides only weak assurance, or at worst we are giving them a false assurance.

It is only the message of God that comes in divine power with the aid of the Spirit.

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## **Two Spirit-Empowered Provisions to Strengthen the Believer's Assurance**

We have just seen **The Powerful Effect of the Word**, and now number two

### **The Joyful Reception of the Word**

Notice verse 6:

#### **1 Thessalonians 1:6 (NASB95)**

**6** You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,

Now, this fills out the picture, doesn't it.

Because up to this point we have only said that it is the powerful effectiveness of the Word of God that the Spirit uses to bring assurance to the heart of the believer...

But there are many people who have heard the Word preached, but either do not believe its message or who do not receive its benefits.

Paul says, "I know that you are God's elect not only because our message came with power, but also, you became imitators of us and of the Lord by receiving the word despite the affliction you were under."

In other words, there is a specific way that he has in mind as to how the Thessalonians imitated the missionaries and the Lord Jesus Himself: it was in their reception of the word in the midst of suffering.

The Thessalonians knew full well that they were getting themselves into.

They had counted the cost and determined that to receive the word in affliction would be better than to reject the word in comfort.

Remember, the missionaries, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy had come to the city of Thessalonica after escaping persecution in the city of Philippi.

In Philippi, they were beaten with rods (Acts 16:22) and thrown into prison.

We are told in Acts 16 [verse 23] that they had their feet fastened to the stocks.

Almost certainly, by the time they arrived in Thessalonica not too long after leaving Philippi, they still bore the physical marks of men who had suffered for what they preached.

On his previous missionary journey, Paul was stoned so bad that they dragged his body out of the city supposing that he was dead.

It is unthinkable that he did not in some way bear the visible marks of suffering for the gospel.

So by the time he arrives in Thessalonica, those who responded positively to his message would have known what they were getting themselves into.

And if they somehow missed it, it only took a few months after Paul was in Thessalonica for them to realize the persecution that they would face.

We read in Acts 17 that a man named Jason in the city of Thessalonica was dragged out of his house because of his close association with the missionaries.

Paul says later in 1 Thessalonians 3 that he had warned them while he was still with them that they would be afflicted and would suffer for their faith in Christ.

So the suffering that they faced was not a surprise to them.

It did not catch them off guard.

They knew what they were signing up for because the man who preached the gospel to them was a suffering man...

And the God they now worshipped had become a suffering man.

Yet in spite of all this, they were not intimidated.

The glory of Christ and his gospel outweighed any suffering that would come.

The Thessalonian church had received the message of the cross despite their experience of much affliction.

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Next, we notice that little phrase, “with the joy of the Holy Spirit.”

This further explains their receptivity to the Word.

Their welcome acceptance of the word of Christ was not only in the midst of affliction, but it was with a spiritual joy that was produced in them by the Holy Spirit.

The same Spirit that had made the word of God divinely effective to them had also produced within them a joyful reception to the word that they heard.

This is why we have called these Spirit-Empowered Provisions to Strengthen the Believer’s Assurance.

We are not going to experience the kind of assurance that we long for without the Spirit empowering the proclamation of His word, and also empowering our joyful receptivity to the word.

We do not want to simply bear up under the word with reluctance, gritting our teeth as we receive it.

Instead, we need the Spirit of God to produce within us joy in our reception of his truth.

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I can't help but think of passages like Luke 11:13,

**Luke 11:13 (NASB95)**

**13** “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”

If we find in ourselves a lack of joy in our reception to the word, Jesus himself promises us that is we come in humble faith and ask the Father give us the Holy Spirit, he will do it.

It is the Holy Spirit's work in us that we need to produce the joy in receiving the truth.

“How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”

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So, it was not **only** their willingness to receive the word in much affliction that gave Paul confidence that the Thessalonians were God's chosen people...

But it was their receptivity in the midst of affliction **with Spirit-produced joy** that gave him the certainty about their election.



There is something unique about the concurrence of joy and suffering that has the unique ability to bring assurance to the heart of the believer.

Listen to how one commentator described it:

“The little phrase, ‘with the joy of the Holy Spirit’ probably tells us much about both the paganism from which they had come and the life of the Spirit into which they had entered. On the one hand, life as a pagan may have had its moments of happiness, as it does for humanity in general, but by and large it was for them a life of heaviness and toil, arid in religion and empty in personal fulfillment ... But in coming to Christ and thus receiving the Holy Spirit, they had been filled with such an unparalleled joy that even in the midst of genuine hardships related to their having become believers, this is the one characteristic of their life in the Spirit that Paul recalls for them as clear evidence of their conversion. This suggests in the strongest possible way that for Paul **joy** is one of the certain hallmarks of genuine spirituality.”<sup>4</sup>

That is exactly right.

It is joy that is produced in our hearts by the Spirit of God in the midst of affliction that gives us one of the most potent assurances that we belong to Christ.

Because it provides such a stark contrast to the weak joy that we had before.

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Now, this shapes how we ought to view our trials, doesn't it?

We waste our trials if we grit our teeth and just endure it.

Instead, we ought to view our trials as opportunities to grow in our joy and therefore to grow in our assurance.

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<sup>4</sup> Gordon Fee, NICNT, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 39.

And we need to take it one step further than that.

It is not only joy in the midst of affliction that we are after, but joy **in receiving the word of God** in the midst of affliction.

Having to undergo affliction is already hard enough... but we make it harder on ourselves when we do not make use of the divine power that is at our fingertips which can produce the kind of joy that we so desperately desire.

We have left behind the kind of temporary and limited joy that our past life offered to us, and in our trials, we have the opportunity to taste the joys of heaven in a way that we would not be able to otherwise.

That is the great paradox of joy and suffering existing in the same heart at the same time:

We are experiencing the **worst** that this world has to offer while at the same time we are experiencing a small taste of the **best** that the world to come has to offer.

Mingled together, we have worst taste of this life mixed with just a fraction of the joy in the life to come...

And when our souls have this paradoxical experience of both deep joy and deep suffering, we know that we belong to God...

Because there is no other explanation for the joy that is within us.

And then it becomes a self-feeding cycle: We experience the joy produced by the Spirit, and then this assures our hearts that we belong to God, and then that produces more joy and contentment.

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So in closing, we return to the question that we asked in the beginning:

Why is it that we expect some spiritual benefit from taking the time to study, to meditate on, and to live according to what is written in a letter like this, or any other book of the Bible?

It is because God's words, and **only** God's words contain the spiritual power necessary to produce any genuine spiritual effect in our lives.

Where else are we going to turn? What other source of divine power do we have access to?

Any mixture of God's truth with human wisdom separates the believer not only from the Word of God, but from the power of God.

And as we joyfully receive a divinely powerful message, we grow in our assurance that we are truly the elect of God.